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CONNECTED OR DISCONNECTED? EXPLORING GEN Z STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION STYLES IN NEGOTIATION CONTEXTS

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Purpose: This study examines the declared behaviors and self-awareness of Generation Z students in face-to-face and online negotiations, exploring how digital environments shape their negotiation dynamics.
Design/methodology/approach: The study draws on 214 survey responses from bachelor's and master's students collected in 2024 via Microsoft Forms. Using K-means cluster analysis, it identifies patterns in Gen Z's negotiation behaviors based on 27 Likert-scale items comparing face-to-face and online interactions, with a focus on factors influencing satisfaction and the role of nonverbal versus written communication.
Findings: The results reveal a marked preference for short-term communication orientation among Gen Z students, accompanied by a strong focus on practical interpersonal skills, including active listening and eye contact. No significant gender differences were identified, which may reflect the broader influence of diversity and inclusion policies.
Research limitations/implications: The research sample was limited to students of SGH Warsaw School of Economics, including Erasmus+ participants, which narrows the scope of generalization. The lack of longitudinal data restricted the ability to capture changes in negotiation skills over time. However, these constraints highlight opportunities for future studies with more diverse and repeated samples.
Practical and social implications: Despite its limitations, the study offers valuable insights into Gen Z's communication orientations as they enter the labor market. The findings can inform educators and trainers in designing more tailored negotiation programs, while also indicating that diversity and inclusion policies may already be shaping communication dynamics in positive ways.
Originality/value: The study advances understanding of how digital communication contexts and generational traits shape negotiation behavior, offering empirical insight into Gen Z's distinct interaction patterns. The paper is addressed to educators, trainers, and HR professionals, as the findings offer practical guidance for developing targeted negotiation training for the emerging workforce.

Keywords: Generation Z, negotiation behavior, communication skills, Face-to-face communication, diversity and inclusion.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In today's digitalized ecosystem individuals smoothly navigate across multiple communication channels (e-mail, messaging apps, video calls) often switching between them during interactions (Leonardi et al., 2012; Maude, 2014; Munkejord, n.d.). This shift is particularly evident in negotiations processes, which are no longer limited to F2F settings. Modern negotiation process often begins with online requests for proposals, proceeds through online communication and may may finish either online or at a F2F negotiation meeting. Popularization of Internet use in negotiations triggered scientific research on the topic. Despite the growing number of studies focusing on the influence of communication medium on the negotiation process (Geiger, Laubert, 2018; Purdy et al., 2000), outcome and negotiators' satisfaction (Geiger, 2014; Kazemitabar et al., 2024; Kiruthika et al., 2020; Sheffield, 1995) several aspects remain underexplored due to the continuous advancement and integration of new technologies.

The current study focuses on digital versus F2F negotiation processes, especially within a semi-structured negotiation context, such as project collaborations or academic assignments, where participants have preliminary information and engage in goal-oriented discussions. In this environment, the negotiation process includes offer exchanges, verification and eventual selection, sometimes before the active dialogue begins. Understanding how communication mode shapes behavior and perceptions in such a hybrid environment is critical as more interactions move online.

The advent of digital technology has revolutionized communication, especially for Generation Z (Gen Z - born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s), who have grown up in a highly connected world. Gen Z's digital fluency, preference for instant communication, and familiarity with virtual interactions distinguish them from earlier generations. This demographic exhibits unique negotiation behaviors that warrant closer examination. Literature on Gen Z's communication patterns highlights their comfort with asynchronous tools, multimedia messaging, and reduced tolerance for ambiguity or delayed feedback (Turner, 2015; Seemiller, Grace, 2016), but how these traits translate into negotiation behavior remains unclear.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the declared behaviors and self-awareness of Gen Z students in F2F and online negotiations. As digital natives, Gen Z's approach to negotiations may differ significantly between F2F and online interactions. This research seeks to uncover how digital environments influence their interactions dynamics. To address this,

the study applies K-means cluster analysis and unsupervised machine learning technique, to identify distinct patterns and groupings within Gen Z's negotiation behaviors. The research explores various factors influencing negotiation satisfaction, such as communication style, negotiation preparation, and cultural influences. Particular attention is paid to nonverbal communication in F2F context versus written communication and tool-assisted interactions with implications for both theory and practice. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of how communication channels and generational characteristics shape negotiation processes. By comparing F2F and online negotiation behaviors, insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each approach for Gen Z have been gained. This knowledge can help to design more effective negotiation strategies and training programs tailored to unique characteristics of the said generation. Furthermore, the research contributes to the broader discourse on how technology shapes interpersonal interactions and decision-making processes in professional settings.

2. Literature review

Paper Gen Z, iGeneration or iGen, post-millennials, Digital Natives and Facebook-generation (Sghari et al., 2023) is a cohort of individuals born between 1996 and 2010 (Gao, 2023), with the oldest members entering the workforce in 2017 (Chen, Ha, 2023). Gen Z officially surpassed the Baby Boomers in the US labor market in 2024 and is expected to represent 30% of the global workforce by 2030 (Dokoupilová et al., 2024). As the first generation to grow up entirely in a digitally connected world, Gen Z became a puzzling generation to discover and in consequence, a topic of scientific research due to their distinctive behaviors, valuers, and communication styles (Chen, Ha, 2023).

Initially, research on Gen Z concentrated on its educational experience, which posed challenges to traditional educational systems (Cilliers, 2017; Schwieger, Ladwig, 2018; Seemiller, Grace, 2016). Studies indicate that Gen Z differs from previous generations and requires more personalized approach in education and favors applied learning (Chardonnens, 2025; Shaker, 2025). While innovative entrepreneurial and passionate, they also demonstrate a tendency towards skepticism and require frequent feedback and instant gratification due to the information overload and shortened attention span. They are comfortable with multitasking, use of digital tools for earning income. As born and grown up “with a smartphone in their hands”, Gen Z desires technology and visual media to be integrated in educational settings (Demir, Sönmez, 2021). This reliance on technology for communication and learning may be interpreted through media synchronicity theory (Dennis et al., 2008) explaining how different media support varying levels of synchronicity and shared understanding. Gen Z’s preference for interactive and visual communication tools aligns with media that allow rapid feedback and

real-time collaboration. Furthermore, the research suggests Gen Z exhibits a preference for individualism in terms of learning, communication, and interpersonal interaction (Pichler et al., 2021). Working in groups is perceived as challenging and problematic for this generation as they are more likely than previous ones to believe that "group projects bring out the worse in people". They do not accept free riding and emphasize learning experience the most (Schlee et al., 2020).

Aside from educational sphere, scholars examined the issues Gen Z's workplace expectations, in particular their job satisfaction, motivation, values, and communication styles (Dokoupilová et al., 2024; Lim, Lianto, 2024; Münz, Mascena, 2024). Research results show that technology plays a central role in the lives of Gen Z, from socializing to schoolwork, entertainment to exercise, relaxation to reference. This may influence their ability to effectively communicate and interact with others. Gen Z relies heavily on text message communication and digital platforms, what may hinder the development of their interpersonal skills such as listening, asking questions, or interrupting in a manner that respects others. They tend to rely on technology for communication, even in situations where it may not be suitable (Raslie, 2021; Schroth, 2019). As employees, Gen Z expects frequent interactions with supervisors, regular feedback about their performance, and also values F2F interactions. In regard to training, this generation is very tech-savvy but may require assistance when it comes to customer-facing roles (Asare, 2018; Irini, Racolţa-Paina, 2021). This links to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggesting that Gen Z's desire for constant feedback and reciprocal communication reflects their orientation toward fairness, trust, and balanced social relationships in professional environments.

Gen Z is more diverse and open to diversity what distinguishes it from previous generations and makes them particularly inclined toward inclusive organizational cultures (Irini, Racolţa-Paina, 2021; Pichler et al., 2021). Communication has emerged as a defining characteristic of Gen Z, both as a strength and challenge. As digital natives who have grown up in a hyper-connected world, Gen Z's communication is influenced by their comfort with technology, social media, and rapid information exchange. Researchers have noted that Gen Z tends to prioritize brevity, directness, and visual communication, with a strong preference for digital platforms such as messaging apps, social media, and video-based interactions (Raslie, 2021; Schwieger, Ladwig, 2018). Gen Z relay heavily on social media platforms as they become the primary arena for connecting with friends, family, and the wider world (Peredy et al., 2024). They strategically segment their use of digital platforms based on audience and purpose: Snapchat for peers, Facebook for family, and other platforms for learning, personal empowerment and entertainment. These distinctions in the use of social media platforms prove unique ways that Gen Z is using technology to communicate (Janssen, Carradini, 2021). According to media synchronicity theory, such platform differentiation illustrates Gen Z's ability to match the medium to the message and the level of immediacy required, enhancing communication efficiency and satisfaction. While they embrace technology, they are also aware

of its drawbacks, including overuse, blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, and concerns over authenticity. They recognize the importance of self-regulation and differentiated communication across contexts (Janssen, Carradini, 2021).

However, recent research underscores a growing concern regarding Gen Z's communication skills. A 2024 study conducted in Canada involving over 1,500 respondents indicated that more than a half believed that social skills had decreased and 25% noticed the deterioration in verbal communication skills (Segal, 2024). This trend has been associated with the reduction of interpersonal contacts during the pandemic and the growing maturity of Gen Z. Reduction of physical contact, focus on privacy and striving for acceptance in social media, addiction to online information, isolation and loneliness, digital bulimia, loss of authenticity were identified as barriers to building social competences necessary in F2F communication (Peredy et al., 2024). These interpersonal challenges are visible in negotiation contexts, where active listening, emotional intelligence, eye contact and ability to interpret the body language are critical. It is also well established that the medium of communication plays a crucial role. Logsdon and Patterson (2010) highlight that digital communication can reduce empathy and moral awareness, increasing the likelihood of deception in interaction. Online communication can facilitate unethical behavior due to anonymity and weak social ties what gives a space for dishonest practices. Moral intensity (defined by magnitude of consequences and perceived social consensus) has been shown to influence ethical behavior in online interactions. This aligns with social exchange theory, as reduced social presence and weaker relational bonds in digital communication may lower perceived social costs of unethical behavior, encouraging strategic information withholding or distortion during negotiation. These findings demonstrate that Gen Z represents a unique blend of digital fluency, multitasking abilities, and value-driven decision-making what influence their communication skills and work attitudes.

Despite a growing number of research on Gen Z's communication and workplace integration, little is known about their negotiation behaviors, particularly in digital context. This study aims to explore the negotiation behavior of Gen Z with a focus on their use of digital versus F2F negotiation channels. In particular, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Gen Z students perceive and prefer negotiation methods (online vs. face-to-face) in future business and professional communication contexts?
2. What role does gender play in shaping Gen Z students' preferences for negotiation communication styles as they prepare for professional careers?
3. How do age variations within Gen Z students influence their negotiation communication preferences and strategies for future workplace interactions?
4. To what extent do regional or cultural backgrounds affect Gen Z students' anticipated negotiation communication approaches in global professional environments?

5. How do communication competencies such as active listening, emotional regulation, and nonverbal behaviors correlate with Gen Z students' preferred negotiation methods in preparation for business careers?
6. What is the relationship between Gen Z students' negotiation method preferences and their attitudes toward ethical communication practices, including fairness and manipulation, in future professional negotiations?

These questions emphasize students' preparation for professional roles and the pedagogical implications for communication education in business contexts. This study offers valuable insights into the evolving communication preferences and competencies of emerging professionals, highlighting how educational strategies can better prepare them for effective negotiation in diverse business environments. By exploring the intersection of negotiation methods and communication skills among future workforce members, the research contributes to advancing pedagogical approaches that align with contemporary and future workplace demands.

3. Methods

In this section, the dataset is presented, followed by descriptive statistics including gender, age, region of origin, and academic discipline of responders. The variables used in the analysis are then introduced. Finally, the statistical methods employed in the study are described.

3.1. Dataset

The dataset consists of responses from an anonymous survey conducted among bachelor and master students via Microsoft Forms in the spring and autumn of 2024, gathering a total of 214 responses. The survey includes 27 questions, with the majority of them using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, apart from basic demographic questions. The primary focus of the survey is a comparison between online and F2F interactions among Gen Z students. This dataset offers valuable insights into the preferences and priorities of Gen Z in both educational and professional contexts.

3.2. Descriptive statistics

The dataset shows an almost equal gender distribution, with 47% male and 53% female respondents. This balance enhances representativeness and reduces potential bias, supporting more accurate and generalizable conclusions across genders (Figure 1).

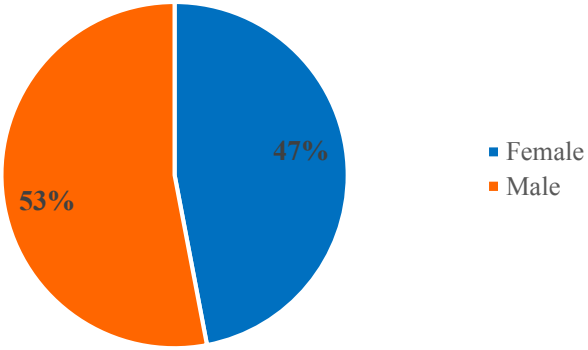

Figure 1. Gender distribution.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The sample demonstrates an almost even distribution across the four age groups, which reflects the inclusion of both bachelor's and master's students in the study (Figure 1).

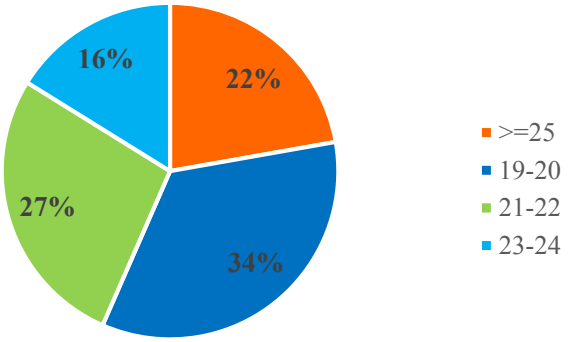

Figure 2. Age distribution.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Achieving such balance across undergraduate and graduate cohorts strengthens the analysis by ensuring that the viewpoints of students at different stages of their academic journey are proportionally represented. This balanced structure supports more reliable comparisons across age categories. The distribution of participants across world regions, following the regional classification used by the World Bank for the 2025 fiscal year (World Bank, 2024) is illustrated in Figure 3.

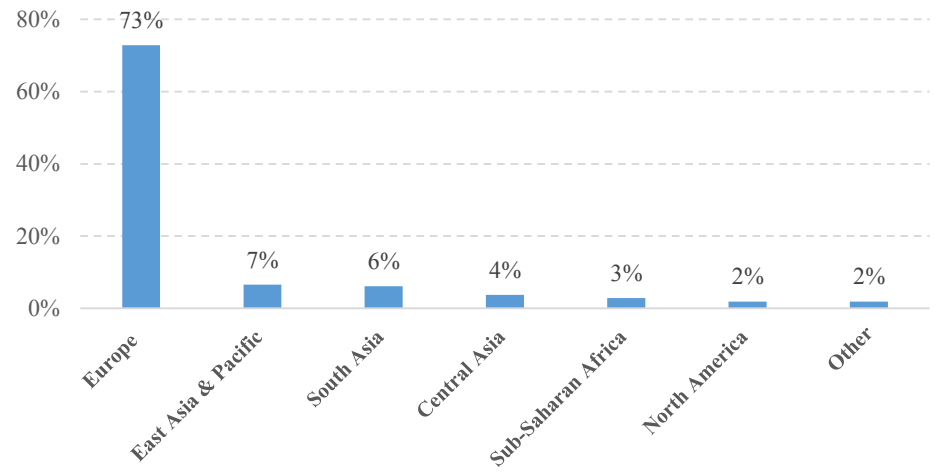

Figure 3. Region distribution.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The majority of respondents (73%) originate from Europe, indicating a strong representation from this region. East Asia & Pacific and South Asia account for 7% and 6% of the sample respectively, followed by Central Asia with 4% and Sub-Saharan Africa with 3%. North America forms the smallest group, contributing just 2% of the total responses. This distribution clearly shows the dominance of European participants in the dataset, while other regions contribute smaller yet meaningful proportions to the overall geographic diversity of the sample.

The distribution of respondents across academic disciplines shows a clear concentration in business-related fields. Business Administration students form the largest segment at 44%, indicating a strong representation from this discipline. They are followed by Finance & Accounting students, who make up 21%, and Management students at 16%. Marketing accounts for 8% of the sample, while the remaining 10% consists of students from various other fields (Figure 4).

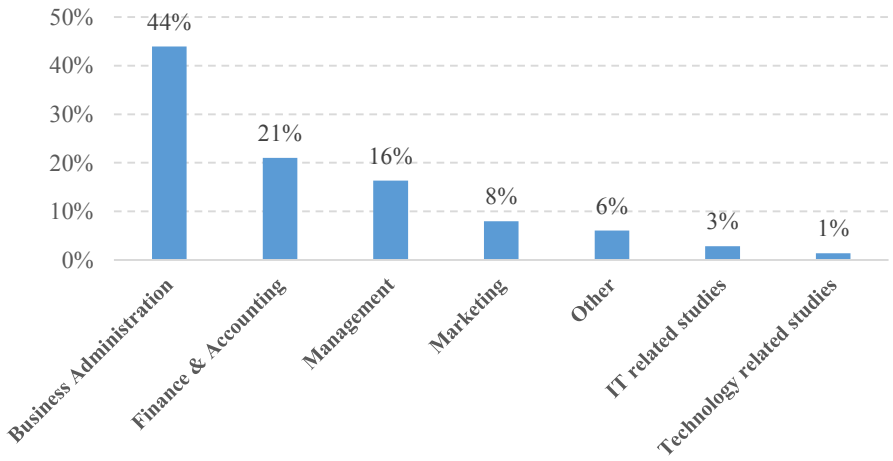

Figure 4. Major distribution.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The major distribution highlights the predominance of Business Administration within the sample, while other fields account for comparatively smaller portions of the respondent population. The employment status of 214 respondents in relation to their field of study is presented in Figure 5.

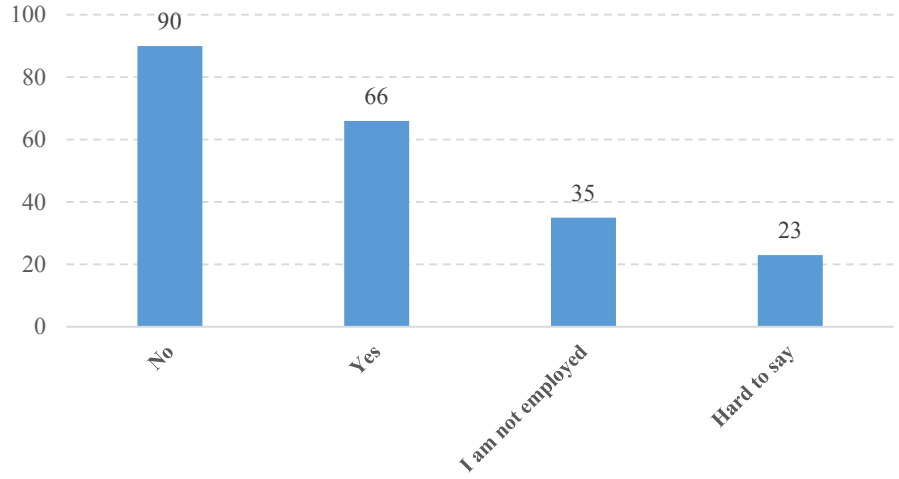

Figure 5. Employed in jobs related to education (number of respondents).
Source: Authors' elaboration.

A majority of 90 out of 214 respondents (42% of total) do not work in a profession related to their education. Meanwhile, 66 respondents are employed in a field aligned with their studies (31% of total sample). Additionally, 35 respondents are not employed, and 23 are unsure how to categorize their employment in relation to their education. Figure 5 reveals that a significant portion of respondents work outside their field of study.

3.3. Variables selection

Following an extensive review of communication literature, key variables related to interpersonal and digital communication were selected to explore their impact on negotiation behaviors:

- *Onlinenegosat* which is the response to the question: How satisfied are you with your online negotiations' skills? (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *F2Fnegosat* which is the response to the question: How satisfied are you with your on-site (Face-To- Face) negotiations skills? (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Emotions* which is the response to the statement: I am very good at controlling my emotions (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Pointofview* which is the response to the statement: During negotiations I can see things from the other party's point of view (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Listening* which is the response to the statement: I prefer speaking rather than listening to other party (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).

- *Sayingno* which is the response to the statement: I feel comfortable saying "no" to other party (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Eyecontact* which is the response to the statement: When listening to other party, I maintain eye contact (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Worstofpeople* which is the response to the statement: I tend to assume the worst of people (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Bodylanguage* which is the response to the statement: I am very good at adjusting my body language during negotiations (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).
- *Playdirty* which is the response to the statement: I am willing to play dirty in order to get my way (Likert scale, see details in Appendix A).

The full version of the questionnaire with scale of responses is available in Appendix A.

3.4. Statistical analysis

The primary goal of analysis was to extract tangible information from the collected data. Due to the fact that data are collected in categories, the meaningful grouping technique was data clustering with a goal to group the data objects whose characteristics and attributes are similar within a cluster and significantly different compared to another group of objects. Despite the fact that K-means algorithm was discovered in 1950s/1960s, it still remains the most popular and straightforward clustering algorithm (Ikotun et al., 2023; Jain, 2010; Sinaga, Yang, 2020). K-means clustering is a technique used to group objects into K distinct categories based on a set of features. This grouping is achieved by minimizing the sum of the squared distances between each object and its corresponding cluster. The K-means algorithm follows these steps: (1) selecting the center of the K-th cluster either randomly or using specific heuristics; (2) assigning each datapoint to the cluster that minimizes the distance between the datapoint and the cluster center; (3) recalculating the cluster centroids by averaging all the datapoints within each cluster; and (4) repeating steps 2 and 3 until the algorithm converges (Hartigan, Wong, 1979).

4. Results

In this section, two K-means clustering results for 214 observations are presented to highlight the differences in negotiation profiles between F2F and online negotiations.

Table 1 illustrates the respondents' satisfaction with F2F versus online negotiations. Out of the total respondents, 60 students (approximately 28%) rated their satisfaction with F2F negotiations higher than online. Meanwhile, 93 respondents (43%) rated their satisfaction with both F2F and online negotiations equally. On the other hand, 61 students (around 29%) reported higher satisfaction with online negotiations compared to F2F.

Table 1.
Number of responders (n) with higher self-assessment of satisfaction with F2F vs online negotiations

Self-assessment	n
F2F better	60
Online better	61
no difference	93

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 1 highlights the diverse self-assessment among respondents regarding negotiation satisfaction. Based on these results, a decision was made to divide the observations into three clusters. This approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis by grouping respondents according to their satisfaction levels with F2F versus online negotiations. The clustering will help identify distinct patterns and define negotiation profile among the different respondent groups.

The division of 214 observations into 3 clusters shows no association with the declared region of origin or gender (Appendix B and C). The results of the principal component analysis, when segmented by clusters and by region or gender, did not reveal any relationship between these factors in the studied sample for F2F negotiations. There are no significant differences in the self-assessment of negotiation skills between genders, both in online and F2F negotiations (Table 2).

Table 2.
Results of self-assessment of online and F2F negotiation skills among genders

Group	Average Online	Average F2F
Female	3,55	3,51
Male	3,46	3,49
Total	3,50	3,50

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The difference of 0.1 p between women and men in the case of online negotiations is not significant, although it requires investigation in further research. The questionnaire also included another gender, but the respondents did not check this box. Therefore, it is not taken into account. Variables such as BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement), negotiation style, or ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) from Appendix A were not included in the clustering process because the article primarily focuses on communication, cultural, and demographic aspects.

There are no significant differences in the self-assessment of negotiation skills between age groups in online negotiations (Table 3). However, in the case of F2F negotiations, an upward trend is observed – self-assessment of F2F negotiation skills increases with age. In the case of online negotiations, the trend is not clear.

Table 3.
Results of self-assessment of online and F2F negotiation skills among various age groups

Group	Average Online	Average F2F
19-20	3,55	3,34
21-22	3,40	3,34
23-24	3,57	3,69
>=25	3,50	3,79
Total	3,50	3,50

Source: Authors' elaboration.

What is noteworthy is the decrease in self-assessment among the 21-22 age group compared to the 19-20 group by more than 0.15 points. This is followed by an increase of 0.17 points in the 23-24 age group compared to the 21-22 group in terms of negotiation skills self-assessment.

The characteristics of three clusters based on respondents' self-assessments related to online negotiations is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Results of K-mean clustering for 11 characteristics and online negotiation satisfaction

Feature	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
onlinenegosat	3,83	3,76	3,12
emotions	3,92	4,37	3,52
pointofview	3,67	4,27	3,70
listening	3,50	2,67	2,35
sayingno	3,85	3,76	2,88
eyecontact	4,06	4,59	3,72
worstofpeople	3,48	2,34	2,50
bodylanguage	3,73	3,91	2,73
playdirty	3,83	2,13	2,08

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Cluster 1 is characterized by the highest self-rated satisfaction with online negotiations. However, it shows average scores in emotional control, maintaining every contact during listening, and adapting body language during negotiations in comparison to all three clusters. Cluster 1 also has the lowest self-ratings in respecting others' point of view, struggles with listening to other part, tends to assume the worst about others, and willingness to play dirty in order to get own way. Cluster 2 demonstrates average satisfaction with online negotiations but stands out with the highest self-assessments in emotional control, understanding other perspectives, reluctant to assume the worst of people, adapting body language, and maintaining eye contact during listening. Cluster 3 reports the lowest satisfaction with online negotiations and rates themselves the lowest in emotional control, felling comfortable saying "no" to other party, lowest score in maintaining eye contact during listening and adapting body language during negotiations. However, respondents in this cluster have very high self-assessments in listening more than talking and strive to "play fair" in order to persuade others to their point of view.

The results of the online negotiation assessments are not conclusive, as a high self-rating of online negotiations (Cluster 1) does not correlate with high ratings in other characteristics. On the other hand, an average satisfaction rating with online negotiations (Cluster 2) is

associated with the highest scores in emotional control, understanding the other party's perspective, and maintaining eye contact.

The results for F2F negotiations are more consistent (Table 5).

Table 5.
Results of K-mean clustering for 11 characteristics and F2F negotiation satisfaction

Feature	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
onlinenegosat	3,88	3,82	2,95
emotions	4,24	3,88	3,59
pointofview	4,19	3,75	3,67
listening	2,67	3,45	2,36
sayingno	3,65	3,88	2,88
eyecontact	4,59	4,06	3,64
worstofpeople	2,33	3,43	2,56
bodylanguage	3,92	3,76	2,60
playdirty	2,00	3,94	2,14

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 5 shows that cluster 1 not only has the highest self-assessed satisfaction with F2F negotiations, but also scores the highest in most characteristics, such as emotional control, understanding the other party's perspective, maintaining eye contact while listening, not assuming the worst about others, effectively adapting body language during negotiations and no willingness to play dirty in order to get own way. Cluster 2, with an average satisfaction rating for F2F negotiations, also shows average scores across most parameters. However, it scores the lowest in playing fair to persuade the other side. Additionally, respondents in Cluster 2 tend to assume the worst about others and often talk more than they listen. Cluster 3 consists of individuals who rate themselves the lowest in satisfaction with F2F negotiations. Similarly, they gave the lowest ratings to their abilities in emotional control, maintaining eye contact, and adapting body language. Interestingly, like in the online negotiation results, Cluster 3 rated themselves highest in listening skills.

Table 5 demonstrates that the satisfaction profile in Cluster 1 (the highest self-assessment) for F2F versus online negotiations presented in Table 4 is significantly different. It is evident that in Cluster 1, those with the highest F2F ratings have much better abilities in understanding other perspectives, maintaining eye contact, and not assuming the worst about others compared to online negotiation profile in Cluster 1.

5. Discussion

The research was conducted among students at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics, some of whom participated in Negotiation Techniques classes and international students from Europe are participants of the Erasmus + exchange. This also means that these are selected students both in terms of grades and social behavior. Therefore, the conclusions are also

burdened with the above factor. Next, it should be considered that management-related courses dominate in the study population. The above courses teach subjects related to communication, ethics, and social responsibility, among others. However, despite the inclusion of ethical issues and social responsibility in the course, unethical tactics based on manipulation are still preferred by the surveyed students, especially in the case of online negotiations. More than 70 percent of the students surveyed are already working, which means that they are in contact with negotiations in a business environment. When it comes to comparing negotiation skills in age groups, one can notice generally lower scores in the case of people who prefer F2F negotiations from the youngest age groups. This score in this group clearly increases in the subsequent age groups. In the case of people who prefer online negotiations, such a trend is not visible.

The analysis of the survey results did not confirm that there were any significant differences in the preferences of Gen Z students in choosing the type of negotiation based on gender and age. The country of origin also did not differentiate the answers. The analysis of the metrics showed that the majority of respondents came from European countries. Therefore, free access to travel opportunities and the participation of Erasmus+ students in the survey meant that no significant differences in the statements were noted. In connection with the above, the authors focused on finding answers to the last 2 questions: is there a correlation between the chosen method of negotiation and effective communication and does a specific method of communication affect the tendency to manipulation. Based on the literature review, it was found that effective communication consists of a certain number of factors. After the analysis, several that were repeated most often were selected and included in the questionnaire. These were: listening, emotional control, body language control, eye contact, considering other viewpoints, ability to say "no"). Four of them were non-verbal behaviors and two - verbal. In turn, 2 areas were selected for the analysis regarding the use of manipulation techniques: engaging in unfair practices, assuming the worst in others.

As a result of further analyses, it was decided to use the K-means clustering algorithm, distinguishing groups depending on the preferred type of negotiation: F2F and/or online. The analysis noted that in the case of age within the F2F group there is a noticeable "jump" in the assessment of negotiation skills. It concerns second-cycle students (master's studies), where the number of professional experiences is higher than in the case of first-cycle students. In the groups preferring online and F2F negotiations, 3 clusters were distinguished: 1 - declaring the highest satisfaction, 2 - with average satisfaction and 3 - with the lowest satisfaction with negotiations. In the case of online negotiations, the differences between clusters occur especially in the case of listening, the ability to say "no", tends to assume the worst about others and the tendency to "play dirty" (the highest in 1, the lowest in 3). In cluster 2, the highest rated skills compared to the other clusters are self-assessment in emotional control, understanding other perspectives, reluctant to assume the worst of people, adapting body language, and maintaining eye contact during listening. Although the tendency to play dirty and perceive people as untrustworthy is not rated above 4 points in each of the clusters, such a tendency is

clearly visible in the case of cluster no. 1, with the highest level of online satisfaction. It is interesting that such a tendency goes hand in hand with maintaining eye contact (manipulating without "blinking"). It should be added, however, that maintaining eye contact was rated quite high in all clusters. The above results do not allow for an unequivocal statement that respondents who prefer online negotiations, depending on the level of satisfaction, have specific communication competences in their own assessment.

In turn, in the groups that prefer F2F negotiations, the distribution of statements is different compared to the online group. Cluster 2 can be distinguished, with an average level of satisfaction. In this case, relatively high listening skills (compared to the other clusters) go hand in hand with "dirty play" and lack of trust in others. Importantly, manipulative behaviors appear to be rooted in perceptions of negotiation as a win–lose scenario (Maude, 2014). This perspective motivates participants to seek advantages via techniques that create information asymmetry and psychological pressure (Lewicki, Robinson, 1998; Malutan, 2025). Similarly, agency theory in economics explains manipulation through information asymmetry when agents may engage in hidden actions or withhold important knowledge from principals (Arrow, 1971; Eisenhardt, 1989; Thaler, 2018). In negotiations, such behaviors enable the accumulation of benefits in the hands of one party, consistent with behavioral economic principles (Brdulak, 2021). Moreover, in Cluster 2, the highest ratings were given to the skills of maintaining eye contact, similarly to the online group. This may mean that the difference between the distinguished groups does not affect the assessment of eye contact as an important negotiation competence. This is also evidenced by the similar level of assessment of body language by both groups, although in the case of F2F negotiations, the cluster with the lowest level of satisfaction (no. 3) also rated this competence the lowest.

Among the limitations of the study, one should mention the selection of the research group. The respondents were students of SGH Warsaw School of economics, partly from the Erasmus+ exchange program. Therefore, the research results can only be interpreted for the above group. One key limitation of the study is the homogeneity of the sample, as it was drawn exclusively from a single university. Moreover, the absence of panel data or multiple time points prevented the measurement of progress in both face-to-face and online negotiations following training. Nonetheless, the article has many positive aspects and its innovative focus on Gen Z provides essential insights into individuals entering the labor market.

6. Conclusions

Brdulak (2008) underlines the importance of both short- and long-term orientations in communication as key elements of negotiation models. This seems particularly relevant for Gen Z, whose communication style is often focused on immediate outcomes and short-term

benefits. The study did not show significant gender differences in self-assessed negotiation skills, which may suggest that ongoing diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives in universities and workplaces have helped reduce perceived disparities. Although recent political developments in the United States may slow the public promotion of DEI policies (Panjwani, 2025), it is unlikely that organizations will abandon the practices they have already adopted. Many appear to be waiting for clearer policy directions before adjusting their public stance.

Active listening, often described as core negotiation competence, also proved relevant for recognizing manipulative behavior. Among participants who preferred F2F negotiations, better listening skills were linked to greater awareness of potential "dirty play". In the online group, a similar tendency appeared among respondents who rated their negotiation competences and the role of eye contact highly, even in settings where visual cues are limited. This suggests that, despite the constraints of online communication, Gen Z negotiators still value and consciously use non-verbal elements such as eye contact to build influence and trust.

Respondents who preferred online negotiations tended to rate their overall negotiation competences slightly higher than those who favored F2F interactions. This may be because online negotiations, while more accessible and less stressful, do not require the same degree of emotional control or adaptability as direct encounters. F2F negotiations demand stronger preparation, greater personal resilience, and the ability to manage tension. As Brdulak (2000) notes, coping effectively with negotiation stress requires the ability to step back and view the situation from a broader perspective, a skill that often develops with experience.

Despite being educated in communication, ethics, and social responsibility, the surveyed students still demonstrated a pragmatic approach to negotiation, with acceptance of manipulative tactics, especially online. At the same time, consistent emphasis on listening and eye contact indicates that Gen Z negotiators do not reject traditional interpersonal competencies but adapt them to hybrid forms of negotiation. Finally, manipulative behaviors in negotiations appear theoretically supported by both negotiation and agency theory. Viewing negotiations as win–lose situations motivates the use of tactics that exploit information asymmetry and psychological leverage. This aligns with the agency theory concepts of moral hazard and adverse selection, offering a behavioral economic explanation for why negotiators may strategically withhold or distort information to maximize benefits.

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Abbreviations

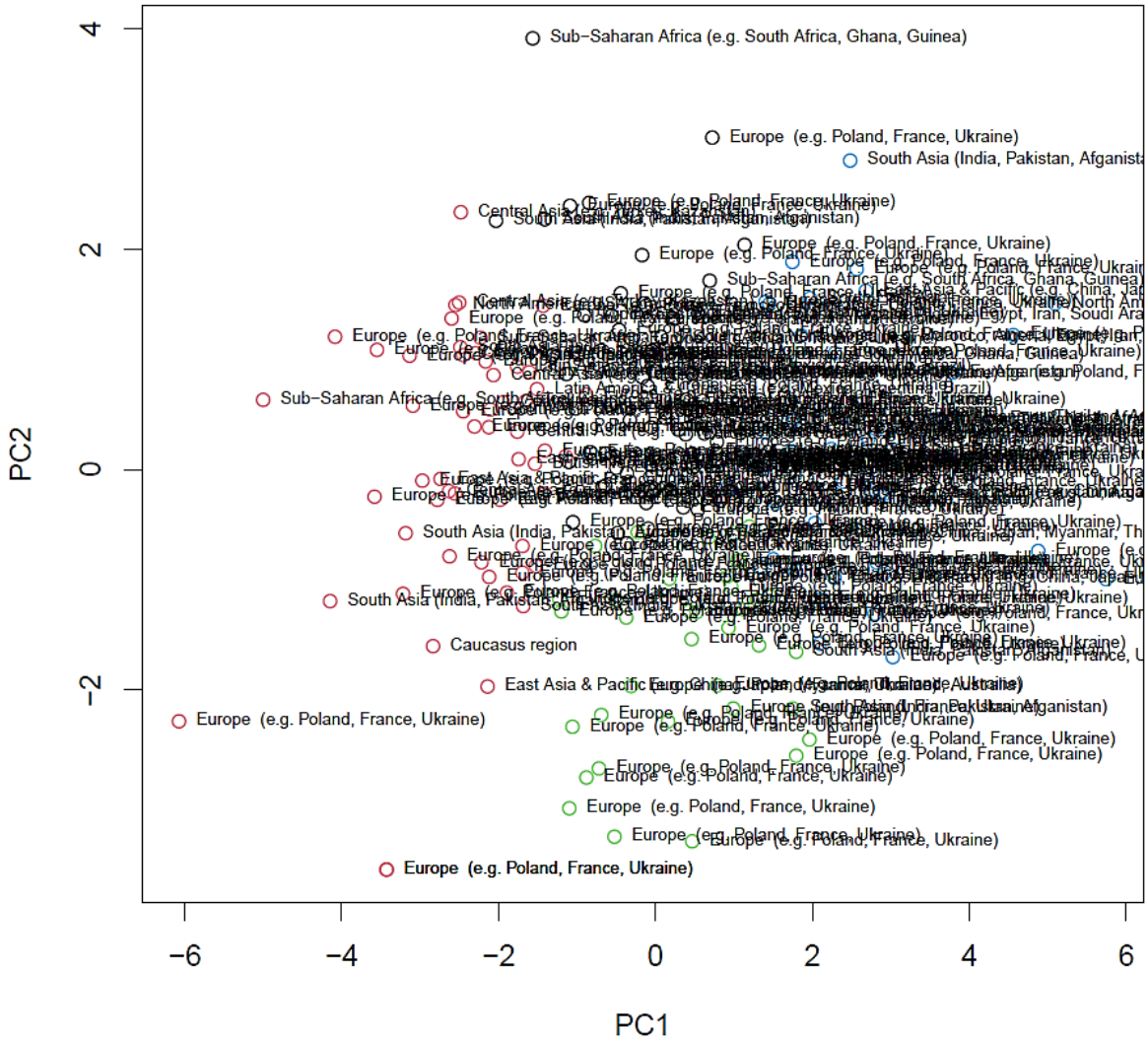
F2F: face-to-face (in-person).
Gen Z: Generation Z (born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s).

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Questions	Variable	Scale
What is your gender?	sex	Male, Female; Other
What is your age?	age	19-20 years old; 21-22 years old; 23-24 years old; >=25 years old
Please select your region (if other please type country):	region	Europe (e.g. Poland, France, Ukraine) North America (USA, Canada) Latin America & Caribbean (e.g. Mexico, Argentina, Brazil) Middle East & North Africa (e.g. Marocco, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Soudi Arabia) South Asia (India, Pakistan, Afganistan) Central Asia (e.g. Turkey, Kazahstan) East Asia & Pacific (e.g. China, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, Australia) Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. South Africa, Ghana, Guinea)
Which of the following majors is the most similar to yours?	study	Finance & Accounting Business Administration Business Administration Law Management Technology related studies IT related studies Social Science Medicine & Health Other
Are you currently employed in job related with your education?	eduemployed	Yes No Hard to say I am not employed
Please select type of your negotiations experience:	negoexp	Private Business Both
How satisfied are you with your online negotiations skills?	negosat	1 - very dissatisfied; 2 - dissatisfied; 3 - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 - satisfied 5 - very satisfied
How satisfied are you with your on-site (Face-To- Face) negotiations skills?	F2Fnegosat	1 - very dissatisfied; 2 - dissatisfied; 3 - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 - satisfied 5 - very satisfied
How comfortable are you during negotiations with party from other country?	country	1 - very uncomfortable; 2 - uncomfortable; 3 - neither uncomfortable nor comfortable; 4 - comfortable, 5 - very comfortable
How comfortable are you during negotiations with party older than you?	older	1 - very uncomfortable; 2 - uncomfortable; 3 - neither uncomfortable nor comfortable; 4 - comfortable, 5 - very comfortable
How comfortable are you during negotiations with party of different gender than you?	gender	1 - very uncomfortable; 2 - uncomfortable; 3 - neither uncomfortable nor comfortable; 4 - comfortable, 5 - very comfortable
I am very good at controlling my emotions.	emotions	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
During negotiations I can see things from the other party's point of view.	pointofview	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I prefer speaking rather than listening to other party.	listening	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I feel comfortable saying "no" to other party.	sayingno	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always

When listening to other party, I maintain eye contact.	eyecontact	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I tend to assume the worst of people.	worstofpeople	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I am comfortable with a conflict situation in negotiations.	conflict	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I am very good at adjusting my body language during negotiations.	bodylanguage	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I prefer to use the same negotiation style for every negotiation situation.	negostyle	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I carefully prepare my negotiations, including BATNAs.	BATNA	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I find it easy to convince people to see/do things my way.	myway	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
I am willing to play dirty in order to get my way	playdirty	1 - never; 2 - rarely; 3 - sometimes; 4 - often, 5 - always
Are you familiar with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?	SDG	Yes No
Are you familiar with Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) metrics?	ESG	Yes No
Which dimension in your opinion is influencing the negotiations the most?	ESGimpact	Environmental dimension (e.g. reduction impact on the planet) Governance dimension (e.g. ensure executives uphold stakeholders rights and interest) Social dimension (e.g. health, human and labor rights, fair wages, working conditions) None of the above
Which of the following do you think is the most important when choosing your future job? (please select max 3)	jobpreference	Work/life Balance ESG activity of employer Job Duties & Projects Health Insurance & Welness Benefits Salary Career Growth Opportunities Investment and Financial Planning Benefits Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at workplace Flexible working hours

Appendix B – Principal component analysis for F2F clustering results segmented by regions of origin



Appendix C – Principal component analysis for F2F clustering results segmented by sex